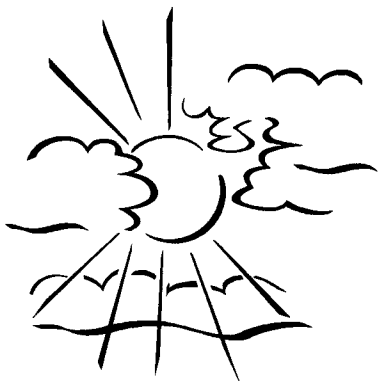


***Department
of
Human
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Prepared by the
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*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips

Thursday, June 8, 2006

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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Program aims to keep children with families

Thursday, June 08, 2006

By Susan J. Demas

sdemas@citpat.com -- 768-4927

More children in the child-welfare system will stay with their families under an overhaul of the embattled Jackson County Department of Human Services.

"This is a new way of doing business," said Pamela Johnson, the county's Family to Family Initiative coordinator said this week.

"We're making what we've been doing far more transparent to the community."

Family to Family debuted in Wayne County in 2001. That was a year before a Jackson County DHS worker investigated the first abuse allegations in the case of Ricky Holland, the 7-year-old Williamston boy slain last year. Though Ricky had rope burns, the investigation didn't implicate his adoptive parents who are now charged with his murder.

"(The initiative) came about before Ricky Holland," Johnson said, "but we knew we had to be making changes and making people more aware of what we do."

After a year's delay due to state budget cuts, the Baltimore-based Annie E. Casey Foundation granted \$2,000 to bring the initiative to Jackson -- one of the worst 15 counties in Michigan in child-abuse reports.

Last year, 777 children were reported abused, more than twice as many as in 2000.

Through Family to Family, DHS officials want to give relatives, children, neighbors and local groups "more of a voice" when the agency gets an abuse report, Johnson said.

"They know what to look for," she said.

Neighborhoods with higher abuse and neglect rates also are being targeted. The agency is planning community strategy sessions.

The goal is to develop an "early warning system" before kids need to be removed from their parents, said Jim Nye, state DHS director of field operation administration.

Family to Family is similarly revamping the county foster-care system of 63 homes serving 365 children.

Caseworkers will try to place children with nearby relatives, instead of splitting kids from their families, friends and schools. DHS employees will recruit foster families willing to take siblings.

"There is less trauma when kids remain near home," Nye said.

Almost 60 Michigan counties are transforming their child-welfare systems. Changes are slated to spread to all 83 counties by next fiscal year.

Meeting set

Jackson Citizen Patriot

Thursday, June 08, 2006

The Family to Family Initiative core strategy meeting is from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. June 20 at the Department of Human Services, 301 E. Louis Glick Highway. Community groups and residents are invited to discuss foster care and child welfare.

Senior foster parent training is from 6 to 8 p.m. June 22 at DHS.

911 staff charged in botched calls

Norman Sinclair / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Wayne County Prosecutor Kym L. Worthy charged two Detroit 911 operators Wednesday with willful neglect of duty for their handling of calls from a 5-year-old boy who was trying to get help for his dying mother.

"We expect our 911 operators to be level-headed, to have common sense, to be analytical, to ask the necessary questions, to exercise good judgment, be skillful and be respectful -- especially with a child," Worthy said in announcing charges against Sharon Nichols, 43, and Teri Sutton 47, both of Detroit. The charges are misdemeanors punishable by up to one year in jail.

Nichols and Sutton, who could not be reached for comment Wednesday, were suspended by the Detroit Police Department. The department didn't comment on whether they will be disciplined, pending the outcome of an internal investigation.

Now 6 years old, Robert Turner lives with his aunt and uncle, Deliana and Tyrone Patterson, who are his legal guardians.

"I'm glad to hear about the charges but I'm a little disappointed when I heard the particulars that they were not going to be fired," Patterson said. "It's just sad because nothing can bring Ms. Turner back."

A spokeswoman for Worthy said she expected the two operators would turn themselves in today. Arraignments would be in 36th District Court in Detroit.

Worthy said the operators treated the Feb. 20 calls as pranks and failed to follow procedures designed to evaluate the nature of the calls. Operators sent police to the home to discipline the child for making prank calls.

Three hours after the second 911 call, police found the boy's mother, Sherrill Lynn Turner, 46, dead on the kitchen floor.

Robert dialed 911 at 5:59 p.m. Feb. 20, and Nichols took the call. The boy told her his mother had passed out, but Nichols insisted he put his mother on the phone. Worthy said the call lasted 43 seconds. During that time, Nichols failed to properly question the boy to determine the problem before hanging up, officials said.

Four hours later, at 9:02 p.m., the boy again called 911 as his mother had taught him to do, Worthy said. This time, Sutton spoke with the youngster for one minute and 16 seconds.

Worthy said in a response similar to that of Nichols, Sutton disregarded the boy's statement that his mother had passed out. Instead, she threatened to send the police over to discipline the child. Nichols was suspended for five days and Sutton for three after the incident.

Edward McNeil, a spokesman for the union that represents Detroit 911 operators, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, did not return calls Wednesday.

Earlier, he said the union welcomed the investigation and urged that investigators also look at systemic problems in the 911 system.

"There were many employment regulations that were violated by both of these operators," Worthy said.

Police Chief Ella Bully-Cummings declined to comment because of the pending internal investigations.

Scott Freitag, president of the Utah-based National Academies of Emergency Dispatch, a nonprofit group that promotes effective emergency dispatch services, said he is not aware of similar cases.

The Detroit charges, he said, would "set a precedent that recognizes that dispatchers have a duty to act professionally."

"The public expects to receive professional care over the phone. If we consider them actual providers of care ... they also need to be responsible for negligence in their jobs," he said.

Detroit News Staff Writer Mark Hicks contributed to this report. You can reach Norman Sinclair at (313) 222-2034 or nsinclair@detnews.com.

Robert Turner's calls to 911

15:16:00- CALL # 1

DISPATCHER: Beep... "911 what's the problem?"

ROBERT: "My mom had passed out."

15:16:19- CALL #1

ROBERT: "She not gonna talk..."

DISPATCHER: "Okay well I'm gonna send police to your house to find out what's going on with you."

15:16:54 - CALL #2

DISPATCHER: "Where's the grownups at?"

ROBERT: (inaudible)

DISPATCHER: "Huh, let me speak to her before I send the police over there..."

15:17:15 - CALL #2

ROBERT: (inaudible)

DISPATCHER: "I don't care, you shouldn't be playing on the phone. Now put her on the phone before I send the police out there to knock on the door and you gonna be in trouble."

ROBERT: "Ugh!!!" (Hangs up)

DETROIT

Cops have medical questions for mom of abandoned baby

June 8, 2006

BY NAOMI R. PATTON
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Detroit police said Wednesday they are looking for the mother of a newborn left Saturday night on the doorstep of a church on the city's west side.

The baby boy was discovered unharmed at 7:30 p.m. at God's House of Prayer, 12929 Joy Road. He was inside a garbage bag, wrapped in a pair of red jogging pants, with his face exposed. His umbilical cord was still attached.

Police said they want to speak with the mother about an undisclosed medical condition that requires a family medical history for treatment.

Police said they are not sure whether the mother will face charges. A state law allows parents to turn over a newborn within 72 hours of birth to an "emergency service provider" -- any uniformed or otherwise identified employee of a fire department, hospital or police station, or anyone on duty inside such a facility.

Anyone with information about this baby can call the Detroit Police child abuse unit at 313-877-7810

Contact NAOMI R. PATTON at 313-223-4485 or npatton@freepress.com.

The Detroit News

June 8, 2006

Detroit

Police search for mom of abandoned child

Police were searching Wednesday for the mother of a newborn boy found abandoned Saturday evening on the rear steps of a west side church. The infant was found inside a garbage bag at the back of the God House of Prayer. The baby was dressed in red jogging pants, and the umbilical cord was still attached. Anyone with information about the newborn or the whereabouts of his mother should call Detroit Police at (313) 877-7810.

The Detroit News

Thursday, June 08, 2006

Wayne Briefs

GROSSE POINTE FARMS

Woman with 42 cats, three dogs charged

Sylvia Gray, 57, was charged Wednesday with two counts of contributing to the delinquency of her minor children for forcing them to live in filthy conditions with 42 cats, three dogs, six birds and small bugs believed to be fleas. Wayne County Prosecutor Kym L. Worthy said inspectors could not move in the house without stepping in cat feces and urine. She said the house had little furniture and the kitchen was filled with dirty dishes. The animals were discovered by city inspectors, who called police May 20. The city's animal ordinance allows two dogs and two cats per household. The delinquency charge is a misdemeanor punishable by a 90-day jail sentence.

Raar in Court, Victim Speaks

By Brandon Truttling

Web produced by Christine Lasek

June 8, 2006

Randall Raar, a man once questioned in the Oakland County Child Killer case, appeared in court Thursday morning on child pornography charges. Also in the courtroom was a woman who claims Raar assaulted her years ago.

Raar's trial was postponed until the end of the month.

April Shipley was seated in the courtroom, despite the fact that she didn't have to be there, and is not expecting to testify.

Shipley spoke with 7 Action News, and explained that she has known and feared Randall Raar for years.

"I met him when I was 8-years-old. He lived behind my grandmother's house," Shipley told 7 Action News. "He was the father figure I didn't have in my life at the time."

Shipley says Raar, who has just been arraigned on child pornography charges, is the same man who forced himself onto her back in the early 1980's, when the now 37-year-old was a teenager.

"I do remember specifically 3 occasions," Shipley said. "I look at my pictures and I think to myself, 'What could he see in somebody my age?'"

Shipley told 7 Action News that she gave pictures of herself as a child to detectives. They will check to see if Shipley's photographs match items taken from Raar's home.

"I want to do whatever I can in order to help bring this man to justice," Shipley said.

Judge hoping for more home-based care for juvenile offenders

Kathie Marchlewski, Midland Daily News

06/07/2006

When Midland County Probate Judge Dorene Allen deals with juvenile offenders, she's been known to tell them that her goal is to keep them out of the orange suits next door at the jail.

She and the community partners who specialize in children's issues have a plan to do just that. The goal: To treat local children, and local problems, locally.

The focus of the plan is on juvenile sex offenders, who often are treated elsewhere. For girls, that could mean being taken as far away as Wisconsin, which is the nearest program specializing in female child sex offenders.

Allen said that by keeping Midland children in Midland County, and offering all-inclusive treatment here, the county can reduce the rate of repeat offenders.

"One of the things we did when we established the JCC is that we are doing this for our kids," Allen said. "We have an opportunity to provide locally based treatment that is less expensive and more effective."

Providing care for the county's juvenile sex offenders could, however, mean giving up a source of county revenue. The Juvenile Care Center has 20 beds, and currently allocates eight of them for rentals -- other counties pay to house their non-sexual offenders here. Typically there are 10 Midland County children in the facility for non-sex-related offenses and 10 housed elsewhere for sexual offenses.

Over the last five years, the county has spent nearly \$7 million to treat juvenile offenders in out-of-county institutions. Almost half of that has been spent on sex offender cases. Allen tells stories of children abused at young ages, who go on to abuse others. One local girl, she said, was 9 when her grandmother's boyfriend abused her. She later abused her brother. An 8-year-old boy was abused by a 16-year-old, and also became an abuser.

"We don't want the children reoffending, and we certainly don't want them reoffending as adults," she said. With treatment, the repeat rate for child sex abusers is very low.

And the cost for residential, outside treatment for those children is an average of \$263 a day -- \$96,000 a year. The revenue the county gets from bed rentals at the JCC is \$54,750. By offering treatment here, Allen said, the county can potentially save \$41,245 a year per child needing those programs.

"This is a reallocation," said Jerome M.P. Kole, trial court administrator. "We spend less to place them here and get better service."

Allen acknowledges there will be a cost to implementation of a locally based program, and it includes lost revenue from the rentals averaging around a half million dollars a year.

She urges commissioners to avoid making money the only matter in deciding to keep children here. "From a community perspective, this is a community that values our children," she said.

And in the long run, she argues that a home-based treatment program will benefit the community in other ways.

"It prevents new victims," she said. "That's why we're talking about this, we want to eliminate victims as much as we can."

While the bed rental money would be lost, other costs would be saved, including the future costs for keeping repeat offenders -- and their victims, who also are more likely to become offenders -- in jail.

Commissioner Rose Marie McQuaid argues that the costs saved by preventing future abuse should be an important consideration. "You can look at it financially," she said. "If we don't treat the family, we are going to pay for it in our jail. Those costs are there."

Commissioners have just begun reviewing the proposal.

"We know what needs to be done," Commissioner Howard Schoenherr said. "We're a do-good community. At some point, money becomes an object -- we don't have any more, can't get any more."

Juvenile home escapees still sought

The Kalamazoo Gazette

Thursday, June 8, 2006

By Rex Hall Jr.

rhall@kalamazoogazette.com 388-7784

Police this morning were continuing to search for two teenagers who escaped Tuesday night from the Kalamazoo County Juvenile Home.

Juvenile home officials, meanwhile, say they are conducting an internal investigation and reviewing security.

Myquan Deantae Rogers, 15, and a 16-year-old boy whose name has not been released overpowered a staff member at about 8 p.m. and then jumped 18 feet to the ground after escaping through a window, juvenile home Superintendent Frank Weichlein said.

Rogers earlier Tuesday was ordered to stand trial as an adult on several charges, including two counts of assault with intent to commit murder in connection with the shooting in the legs of two people May 20 on Florence Street in Kalamazoo, according to the Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety.

Weichlein said the 16-year-old was awaiting placement in a residential facility for juveniles.

The 21-inch-by-21-inch window the teens escaped through is in a staff office on the upper level of the facility's detention unit, Weichlein said. Officials on Wednesday were still trying to determine what exactly transpired in the moments leading up to the teens' escape, he said. They also are reviewing staff performance and accessibility to the office the boys escaped from, he said.

Weichlein said the last escape from the facility occurred in the summer of 2005, when a juvenile fled from the dining area. An investigation found staff members were not in proper positions when the escape occurred, and disciplinary action against them was taken, he said.

Kalamazoo Gazette

June 8, 2006

Universal health care has become necessity

Universal, single-payer health care must become the No. 1 priority of this nation. Otherwise, our medical system will collapse within 10 years. As the baby boomers begin taxing the private insurance system, the sheer magnitude will be more than our country's employers can bear.

The reason we pay double the per-capita rate for health care, compared to other industrialized nations, is simple. There is layer-upon-layer of non-value-added profit-taking in our current health care system. Only about \$5 of every \$10 spent on health care in the United States actually reaches the patient level. On average, over 28 percent of private health care dollars go to administrative overhead, compared with about 3 percent for Medicare and Medicaid.

It is no mystery that Medicare and Medicaid are the most cost-effective insurance programs in America. If we included healthy groups in these plans --workers, middle- and upper-middle wage earners, etc. -- these plans would be even more cost-effective. Removing the burden of paying premiums from businesses could free up a tremendous amount of capital, for reinvestment and growth.

Of course, the only way to pay for these would be through increases in progressive taxes or a repeal of the tax cuts already recently extended -- and that's why the libertarian wings of both parties resist national health care.

It will take tremendous leadership to overcome these resisters -- from both parties! But, the leader who can sell universal health care for what it truly is -- both a social justice and pro-business solution -- could write their way to victory!

Phillip Seager

Sturgis

Wipe Out Homelessness In Ten Years

MIRS, Wednesday, June 7, 2006

Conferees at the Michigan Affordable Housing Conference were told that the state has a plan to eliminate the homelessness problem in 10 years.

During a panel discussion it was reported that the state had 22,600 homeless individuals living in shelters during the first quarter of this year including 6,000 who are chronically homeless. Also included in the head count were more than 6,700 children under the age of 10 with half of those being victims of neglect or abuse.

Ninety-eight percent of the counties have agreed to draft strategies to eliminate the homeless problem over the next 10 years and Department of Human Services (DHS) director Marianne **UDOW** promises to have the remaining 2 percent on board soon.

Currently, the state is spending \$8 million to help 16,000 families pay their first month's rent and to avoid eviction with many of those clients having mental and physical disabilities. Drug addicts and ex-inmates are also part of the homeless population.

A growing challenge is the number of foster care children who turn 18 and can no longer stay in the foster homes. They either end up in shelters or on the street. Worse yet, some of them return to their original families, where they again become victims of abuse.

A record 1,625 persons attended the three-day event at the Lansing Civic Center.

Brazile: Keep Standing Up

The former 2000 campaign manager for former presidential candidate Al **GORE** today told some 1,600 affordable housing advocates to continue to fight on for "the least of these."

Donna **BRAZILE** told the audience at the 2006 Michigan Affordable Housing Conference today that she's familiar with the struggle for affordable housing.

"I know what it means," she said. "I want you all to continue to fight on."

While growing up, she along with her parents and eight siblings, became homeless.

"It took a long, long time before we got settled," Brazile said. "There are a lot (of homeless). Some say 750,000 homeless on our streets. We have now an opportunity to make housing an important national debate."

Brazile is now serving as an adjunct professor at Georgetown University and is also working with Louisiana Gov. Kathleen **BLANCO** to obtain housing funding from the federal government to rebuild some 200,000 homes destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

To date, she's gotten the President George W. **BUSH** administration to support sending down \$6.4 billion in community block development grants for housing repair and replacement.

"This money is for housing," Brazile reports telling other Louisiana officials. "It's not for anything else." The federal aid will go to provide every person who lost homes up to \$150,000.

On a personal note, the long-time Democratic activist who is a native of New Orleans retold how her father, despite her offers of help, opted to stay in New Orleans and ride out Katrina.

"He didn't have a cell phone," Brazile said of her father. "So, for four days I didn't know if he was alive, or dead. For days, I looked at the pictures on TV and I prayed."

When she finally did hear from her father, he was safely in San Antonio. However, a sister with disabilities who was residing in an assisted living center, wasn't rescued until Brazile made a national televised plea.

Ultimately, a Fish and Wildlife worker who'd contacted Brazile after her appeal took his boat out and saved the sister and four other residents of the assisted living center that'd been left behind during the evacuation.

*(Senior Capital Correspondent Tim **SKUBICK** contributed to this report.)*

Man admits shooting girlfriend to death

Thursday, June 08, 2006

By John S. Hausman
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Click -- bang!

Click -- bang!

Click -- bang!

That's how a drunken Bruce Ray Uhl murdered his longtime live-in girlfriend, Brenda Michelle Orton, last November: one shot to the chest, two to the head -- stopping to recock his antique, single-action revolver before every shot.

And that scenario -- combined with witness statements that Uhl had repeatedly threatened Orton with the same gun -- convinced a Muskegon judge that Uhl was guilty of first-degree, premeditated murder.

Based on police and autopsy reports, 14th Circuit Judge William C. Marietti agreed Wednesday afternoon to accept a surprise "no contest" plea by Uhl to that maximum count. A first-degree murder conviction guarantees the defendant life in prison without chance of parole.

"It's highly unusual for anyone to plead to first-degree murder," said Muskegon County Prosecutor Tony Tague. "However, this was a brutal murder, and he immediately confessed to officers at the scene.

"He shot (his girlfriend) in front of his own children and certainly showed no regard for the traumatic impact on his children," Tague said. "We had intended on going to trial and were surprised at the last-minute plea by the defendant."

Uhl had been scheduled for a jury trial next week on open murder and a felony firearm count.

A no-contest plea is not an admission of guilt, but judges treat it as a guilty plea at sentencing. Judges must use other evidence to persuade themselves of a defendant's guilt, or else reject the plea. Under Michigan law, "no contest" is permitted when a defendant faces civil liability or claims not to remember the crime, both of which apply in Uhl's case.

In this case, the 70-plus pages of graphic police and autopsy reports left the judge with no doubt of the defendant's guilt.

Tague's office refused to offer Uhl a lesser plea to second-degree unpremeditated murder, which would have given the 42-year-old the chance of parole someday.

Usually a defendant in such a situation goes to trial, with nothing to lose and the hope of a lesser conviction, if not acquittal.

But Uhl surprised his own lawyers by offering to plead to first-degree murder. "Mister Uhl made his choice," said public defender Annette Smedley. "After speaking to him, he indicated he had a desire to take the plea.

"It was his choice for personal reasons," she said, declining to elaborate based on attorney-client privilege. "We didn't advise him either way. It was a surprise."

Uhl said little in court during his plea, merely answering "yes" or "no" to the judge's questions.

In exchange for the plea, prosecutors dropped the felony firearm count. It's a moot point, given the mandatory life sentence.

Marietti scheduled sentencing for 1:15 p.m. July 11.

Uhl stands convicted of shooting the 36-year-old Orton in their home at 1137 E. Forest after an argument, the last of many over at least a couple of years. Police reports also indicate Uhl had a prior conviction for domestic violence against Orton -- later suppressed in court files, as sometimes is done -- leading to a personal protection order that Orton had lifted several months before her murder.

Acquaintances told police that Uhl was a heavy, daily drinker who often was jealous of Orton, suspecting her of seeing other men.

All three of Uhl's and Orton's children, whose ages ranged from 9 to 15 at the time of the killing, were in the house when it happened. The couple's 9-year-old daughter, Ashley, told detectives she heard three shots, after hearing her parents shouting and after seeing her father holding his gun. She ran and got her 14-year-old brother, Ricco, from his bedroom. They both found their severely wounded mother lying on steps leading from the kitchen to the garage, and Ricco called 9-1-1 at 9:04 p.m. A third son, 15-year-old Bruce, who is mentally and physically disabled, bedridden and unable to speak, was lying in his bed nearby.

Police found Orton unconscious and nearly lifeless. She was pronounced dead shortly afterward in the emergency room of Mercy General Hospital Sherman Campus.

According to a Muskegon County medical examiner's report, Orton was shot once in her left cheek below the eye, with the bullet lodging in her brain; once in her left chest, with

the bullet passing through her heart and lodging in her right lung; and once in her left scalp.

Police said Uhl was standing outside when officers arrived. His .22-caliber revolver was confiscated at the scene.

Uhl confessed to police almost immediately, according to police reports, although he claimed not to remember actually firing the shots.

A portable breath test shortly after his arrest showed a blood-alcohol level of 0.16 percent, twice the legal level for driving in Michigan. However, voluntary intoxication is not a defense against a premeditated murder charge in Michigan.

According to police reports, Uhl's sister, Katharine Grace Johns of Twin Lake, told police that twice in the preceding two weeks, Uhl had threatened Orton's life with the handgun in Johns' presence.

'Love triangle' behind slaying

Thursday, June 08, 2006

By Heather L. VanDyke
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Authorities say an apparent "love triangle" is behind the shooting Tuesday that left a Chicago man dead in the doorway of a Muskegon Heights apartment.

On Wednesday, a warrant was issued for the arrest of Rudolph Deshaw McKinney, of 4188 Dickers, Detroit, who is accused of shooting Marlon Preston Gresham Sr., of Chicago, several times in the upper torso at 615 Howell, Apt. A.

McKinney, who turned 27 the day of the shooting, was still at large today.

The warrant indicates McKinney faces one count of open murder, a potential life felony; two felony firearm counts, which carry a two-year maximum penalty to be served consecutively with other charges; and one count of possession of a firearm by a felon, a five-year felony.

Meanwhile, police are investigating the motive for the shooting, which appears to be a "love triangle" and "relationship gone bad," said Muskegon Heights Interim Police Chief Clifton Johnson.

The incident occurred at the home of Kayeda Hector, 30, who police say was linked romantically with the suspect and the victim.

Hector was dating McKinney at the time of the shooting, and has four children with Gresham, Johnson said. Hector could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Johnson said the shooting happened just before 9 p.m. when Gresham came to Hector's house while McKinney was there.

"He was let into the house by Hector," he said.

A "brief argument ensued" while Gresham stood inside the entrance of Hector's apartment and then "shots rang out" from a weapon in McKinney's possession, Johnson said.

Gresham was not armed at the time, he said.

When Gresham fell to the ground, Hector bent down to attend to him. That's when McKinney fled out the back door of the apartment, Johnson said.

"There were other eyewitnesses outside that saw him storm out of the back door," he said.

Johnson said McKinney was the only suspect being sought.

McKinney is described as a black male, with brown eyes, 6 feet tall and weighing 160 pounds.

McKinney has a prior criminal history that includes a conviction for attempting to commit a felony on Feb. 13, 2001, for delivering or manufacturing marijuana in Wayne County, and a second conviction for delivering or manufacturing marijuana in Wayne County on Oct. 18, 2001. He also was convicted of a firearm charge in 2000.

Gresham had two separate Muskegon addresses listed at one time with Muskegon County officials, but Muskegon Heights Police say he was a resident of Chicago at the time of the shooting.

No funeral arrangements for Gresham were available as of this morning.

Seminar to focus on senior safety

Thursday, June 08, 2006

By Myron Kukla
The Grand Rapids Press

HOLLAND -- Julius Petz was shocked by the alleged rape of an 83-year-old woman during a home invasion in Holland this spring.

"You get crazies everywhere and need to protect yourself and your home," said Petz, 74, a summer Holland resident who, with his wife, Alice Kobs, lives half the year in the Dominican Republic.

To help seniors such as Petz and others concerned by the attack, Evergreen Commons Senior Center is joining Resthaven Patrons and the Holland Police Department to offer a safety seminar to help seniors be more secure at home.

Titled "Safety at Home for Seniors," the free seminar will be at 10 a.m. June 15 at Evergreen Commons.

"The seminar will focus on teaching practical things seniors and their families can do to create a safe physical home environment for seniors in our community," said Dave Ellens, associate director of Evergreen Commons.

Ellens said the assault in late April is the motivation behind the seminar.

"Since the attack, a lot of seniors are very nervous that someone could break into their home. There is a lot of concern for safety right now in our senior community," said Holland Police Captain Rick Walters, who is helping plan the seminar.

"The home break-in and attack has brought senior safety back to the forefront, and it's our job to help educate people on ways they can increase the safety and security of their homes," Walters said.

Accused attacker in the rape case, Kevin Spencer, 20, has been ordered to stand trial on three counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and one count of home invasion. If convicted, he could face life in prison.

"It doesn't make any difference where you live these days," Petz said. "We feel fairly safe because we live in a condominium community in Holland, but these things are a regular occurrence in the Dominican Republic, even in the best neighborhoods."

He said the best protection for homeowners is knowing your neighbors and everyone keeping an eye on each other.

"It's sad to say, but a lot of people don't know their neighbors today. And those are the people who watch out for you and help if there's trouble," Petz said.

That's one piece of advice that will be given at the seminar.

"Knowing your neighbors is very important," Ellens said. "If something should happen to you, people need to have a safety net of those around them that they trust. That includes being able to call each other and even having someone other than family be able to get into homes to check if no one sees them for a while."

Other practical advice to be covered at the seminar includes a nightly ritual of making sure all doors and windows are locked, getting deadbolts installed and having a contact list of family and neighbors.

"We want people to feel safe and confident living in their homes," Ellens said.

The seminar is free and requires no advance registration.

Send e-mail to the author: lakeshore@grpress.com

Thursday, June 08, 2006

Unger lawyers hope to prove deck railing was deteriorating

Subpoena seeks documents from engineering analysts, but prosecutors say there are no such reports

Mike Martindale / The Detroit News

BEULAH -- Defense attorneys in the Mark Unger trial hope to determine sometime Thursday whether Oakland County and state officials have withheld evidence that could ultimately exonerate a Huntington Woods man charged with the murder of his wife at a northern Michigan lakeside resort.

The issue surfaced Wednesday outside the courtroom during the trial of Mark Unger, 45, whom prosecutors say killed his wife Florence in October 2003 at the Inn of Watervale, about 10 miles south of Frankfort.

Defense attorney Robert Harrison said he subpoenaed documents Monday from a California engineering firm hired in 2004 by Oakland County to analyze a wooden railing from a boathouse deck where Florence Unger, 37, was last seen alive.

The findings are important to Unger because they could prove the railing was deteriorated and rotting, as defense attorneys have contended, and might have contributed to an accidental fall by Florence Unger.

"We don't know what they (investigators) have or what they found out," said Harrison. "My concern is there is something that they found out that we should have been provided under court rules.

"We know that portions of the deck were removed in 2004 and shipped off to Chicago where they were held for two years."

The prosecutor, state assistant attorney general Donna Pendergast, is teamed on the case with Oakland County assistant prosecutor John Skrzynski and Mark Bilkovic, a former Oakland County assistant prosecutor who worked on a child custody case involving Unger's two sons. It was during that probate court battle that the deck railing was removed, Harrison noted.

Prosecutors believe Unger and his estranged wife argued on the boathouse deck before she fell or was pushed off and that Unger then drowned her in Lower Herring Lake. Florence Unger was found floating face down in the early morning hours of Oct. 25, 2003. Unger maintains his innocence and said he left Florence alone on the deck at the Watervale resort and went back to their cabin, where he stayed all night with the couple's two sons.

Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca on Wednesday said the county in 2004 hired Exponent Inc., a Menlo Park, Calif.-based engineering firm, to take photographs

and measurements of the railing, and to dismantle it and store it. The county paid about \$31,000 for the work.

The county intended to have the firm recreate a wooden railing for court reenactments, but eventually determined the aged wood from the Watervale resort was too difficult to recreate and abandoned those plans in late summer 2004, according to Deb Carley, Oakland County chief deputy prosecutor. The company did not submit a report to the county, she said.

"I'll see Harrison at the attorney grievance commission if he continues to state we're withholding evidence," Gorcyca said Wednesday. "There were no findings, so there are no findings to hide."

Subpoenas were served on Monday at Exponent offices in Farmington Hills and also a corporation agent in Bingham Farms, ordering it to produce all documents related to the work it did on the resort's deck and railing. Neither could be reached for comment on Monday.

In court Wednesday, the Benzie Circuit Court jury viewed what a former biomechanical engineering professor said could have been the final seconds of a Huntington Woods woman's life, as depicted by computer animated graphics.

The jury of eight men and seven women saw several angles of an image of Florence Unger pitching helplessly -- in three alternate scenarios -- both backward and forward over a 26-inch high railing on a boathouse deck. The animation showed her falling 12 feet to a concrete pad where she likely suffered a potentially fatal head injury.

The man whose opinions shaped the animations -- Dr. Igor Paul, a retired biomechanical engineering professor from Massachusetts Institute of Technology -- told the jury how Florence Unger's momentum caused her to roll over a seawall and into the shallows of Lower Herring Lake. She was found floating face down there the next morning.

The less than a minute of computer animation could be crucial to Mark Unger, who faces a mandatory life sentence if convicted of the killing.

"It's an illustration of my opinion based on a low railing and what may have happened accidentally to her," said Paul, of the animations, considered critical to the defense countering of a circumstantial evidence case against Unger.

Judge James Batzer permitted Paul to discuss and show some of his animations following a hearing without the jury present. Batzer would not allow the display of two other scenarios in which Florence Unger rolled but stopped at the seawall edge and then twitched over the side from possible seizures related to a head injury. Batzer said Paul had not been established as an expert in seizures.

Paul, a New London, N.H. resident, told the jury he has never visited Watervale, and the animations were based on storyboards he provided to a Boston illustrator. Paul said the scenarios were created from autopsy reports, photographs, and state police reports. The animations cost "about \$10,000" to produce, Paul said.

In an intense cross-examination of Paul, Pendergast asked: "You don't mean to say this is what happened? You don't know what happened, do you?"

"No," said Paul, who said he wasn't certain that the death occurred from an accidental fall.

Pendergast also questioned why the blue comforter Mrs. Unger was seen wrapped in on the deck the night before she was found, and which was found lying on the cement

pad, was not included in the scenarios of the falling, rolling woman. Paul said he had heard of the comforter but did not include it in scenarios. He said it could have fallen off her as she fell off the deck and then "contacted the concrete after she rolled away."

"I really did not know what happened with the blue comforter, it was found on the boat hoist so I didn't put it in the animation at all," said Paul, who added even if the blanket landed after she rolled into the lake, it would still be consistent with his findings.

But Paul said he was certain of other aspects of the physical evidence he has considered in coming to his opinion.

"The railing wasn't acting as a railing," said Paul . "It was nine to 10 inches below the center of gravity of a person the size and weight of Mrs. Unger."

Paul said that could cause a fall for someone who leaned on, sat on or even walked along the railing.

Defense attorney Thomas McGuire said seven railing posts were found broken off at the railing, which was loose and could have been pushed forward several inches. McGuire also recalled witness testimony about slippery spots later found on the deck and height differences.

Paul stressed the height of the railing concerned him the most.

"It's the height of the railing -- 26 to 27 inches -- is extremely low compared to a regular effective railing which is around 36 inches at least, or 42 inches," said Paul.

Paul who is five-foot, 10 inches tall, demonstrated for the jury that his center of gravity, like everyone's, is at about "the belly button."

"For the height and weight of Mrs. Unger, her center is about 36 inches above the ground," Paul said. "At 26 inches, (the railing) came up to just above her knees. Her center of gravity is 10 inches above this.

"Either running into the railing forward or backwards," said Paul. "Or to sit on the railing. Your center of gravity would go beyond you would have no control and you would fall over the railing."

At one point of her quizzing of Paul, Pendergast criticized some of his conclusions.

"I have something here you identified as an injury behind the knee," said Pendergast, holding up a photograph. "Would you be surprised if I told you this has been identified by (Kent County Medical Examiner) Dr. (Stephen) Cohle as the outside of Mrs. Unger's elbow and arm?"

After several minutes of searching through photos, Paul said: "It's not in these photos, I need to concede, I guess."

Jurors took notes during Paul's testimony and passed several questions to the judge, including whether the blue comforter, which he didn't include, could have caused her to trip ("yes") or cushioned her from any injuries ("no")

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The wait for food

Thursday, June 08, 2006

By HELEN LOUNSBURY
BAY CITY TIMES WRITER

OSCODA - The gates won't open for another six hours, but cars are queuing up before 8 a.m. anyhow. The cars eventually form a line nearly a mile long down Oscoda's US-23.

Residents in rural Iosco County aren't waiting for cheap prices at the gas pump. They're not lingering to buy celebrity event tickets.

They're hungry.

This week, as they do once a month, they lined up again outside Oscoda's Assembly of God Church for a food giveaway.

"I've been coming 18 months, and it helps me a lot," attests Ardith Rootes, 58, of Whittemore, recovering from recent knee surgery. "When you're choosing between medicine and food every month, it sure does help."

Funny thing is, neither Rootes, her husband, Sydney, nor anyone else here needs to wait in line, organizers say. In three years since six area churches launched the food giveaway, they've never run out of food.

"We tell people every month, 'Please, don't wait, it's not necessary. We always have enough,'" explains the Rev. Eric Hendricks, Assembly of God pastor and giveaway coordinator. "But they stay."

"To me, it shows their desperation," he continues. "They're afraid."

Rootes and her husband mirror a majority who come to the Oscoda food distribution. Most are elderly, handicapped or both, organizers say. A smaller number are younger, single people and families, who've fallen on hard times, organizers say.

This month, Rootes dispensed with buying medications her doctor prescribed because she can't afford them, she says. Nor can she qualify for food stamps because she makes too much as a part-time delivery person for a regional advertiser.

On Monday, volunteers at the Assembly of God are glad to see Rootes back. She's among 300 householders - about 700 individuals - who received 40-50 pounds of groceries, including fresh vegetables, from the distribution.

As a rule, the church gives away 17,000 pounds of food monthly. Monday's outlay varied only in that the Flint supplier, Food Bank of Eastern Michigan, paid the \$800 trucking charge in recognition of this week's National Hunger Awareness Week, organizers said.

Typically, local churches cover the expense.

For recipients, it mattered only that the tide of groceries was flowing Monday. To limit illegitimate requests, recipients give their name, address, and phone number, and sign a statement of need, before picking up groceries.

Many leave thank-you notes for church volunteers, coordinators say.

"The need is absolute," says the Rev Tom Anderson of Emmanuel Mission Church in Oscoda, a project partner. "The economic situation up here leaves a lot of people living hand-to-mouth. It's important for us, as a Christian community working together, to have an impact on people with such basic needs."

- Helen Lounsbury covers regional news for The Times. She can be reached at 1-800-727-7661 or by e-mail at hlounsbury@bc-times.com.

Food giveaway planned next week

The Grand Rapids Press

Thursday, June 08, 2006

OTTAWA COUNTY -- The county's Community Action Agency will be doling out food boxes next week. They are part of a CAA program designed to help seniors and children. Distribution is scheduled for Tuesday in Holland at Community Action House, 345 W. 14th St., and Jenison at the Georgetown senior center, 7096 8th Ave.; June 15 in Grand Haven at the Salvation Army, 310 N. DeSpelder, and Coopersville's VFW Post 5598, 511 68th St. Visit miottawa.org/caa.

Habitat blitz begins Friday

Thursday, June 08, 2006

MICHAEL GREENLEE
THE SAGINAW NEWS

he pounding of hammers and screaming of saws from 8 a.m. to dusk Friday will signal the start of the 10th annual Saginaw Habitat for Humanity blitz build.

Habitat volunteers will build five houses at four Saginaw sites during a two-week construction campaign ending Saturday, June 24.

"This is the first time we've had a blitz in scattered areas," said Paul D. Warriner, 59, of St. Charles, Habitat executive director.

The project raises some concerns, he said. "The issues for us are going to be logistics, food and first aid to all these places at once," he said. "But we feel confident."

Warriner said there are more families on the waiting list this year, which translates to more volunteers Habitat can recruit to build more houses.

Habitat's construction chairman, Charlie A. Wargel, 70, of Saginaw Township will work on his 100th house.

"I'm just one of 1,200 volunteers," said Wargel, a former engineer and strategic planner for General Motors Corp.'s Powertrain Division.

Wargel's string started on the first day of his retirement in May 1998. He said he'll arrive at a building site Friday morning and probably won't leave until 9 p.m.

"That's the way it'll go for the next 13 days," Wargel said.

The Grand Rapids Press

Habitat gets a hand up

Thursday, June 08, 2006

Amid the buzz about high-end housing in downtown Grand Rapids, it's refreshing to hear a Habitat for Humanity project is moving ahead. A city panel wisely approved a plan to build 22 condominium units for low-income families south of 28th Street.

City leaders should be working with groups to provide affordable housing in the community. Habitat's project deserved a second look from the Board of Zoning Appeals, after the Planning Commission's ill-advised rejection and unfair

maneuver that blocked a City Commission appeal.

Fortunately, for 22 families, the zoning board analyzed the facts regarding legitimate neighborhood concerns, mostly regarding extra traffic.

Construction could begin next spring on what would be Habitat's first local condominium project. For families in need of affordable housing, it shouldn't be the last.

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Unity -- or division?

Thursday, June 08, 2006

Officials at United Way of Jackson County continue to deal with fall-out over recent changes in the allocation of funds.

In the past, United Way raised funds in its fall campaign and allocated them in predictable fashion. Member agencies could count on being funded at certain levels. Increasingly, United Way is focusing on needs rather than programs and agencies. And that is a direction set by local volunteers who help United Way determine community needs and funding responses.

One common criticism this year raises the question: Why did United Way raise about \$3 million last year and give only about \$1 million to local organizations? United Way's board is considering changes that would address that complaint by changing how contributions are reported on the agency's campaign thermometer.

One of the most uncomfortable changes is that United Way increasingly ends up administering some initiatives it also funds. For example, rather than let a valuable teen-pregnancy program started with state grants lapse as grants ended, United Way took it on. Bottom line: A high priority need is being addressed. There is also the practical reality that donors are able to earmark contributions. About half a million dollars last year was earmarked, and not all of it goes to United Way-affiliated organizations.

Many area charitable groups are struggling to maintain programs. It is especially vital to remember that United Way is a unifying force in a common cause. Any change of practice is bound to be uncomfortable. The alternative, however, is fragmentation -- all the agencies doing their own thing, openly competing for contributions. None of us wants that.

Thus, it is to everyone's benefit for the United Way family to remain together -- even in disagreement. Ask not what agencies are being funded, but what needs are being addressed.

--The Jackson Citizen Patriot

Agencies get grants

The Grand Rapids Press

Thursday, June 08, 2006

HOLLAND -- The City Council will provide \$100,000 in grants to social service agencies plus \$49,000 in potential additional matches for those that obtain funding from adjacent governmental units. Last week, council discussed dropping the match component of the funding, saying the incentive hadn't generated the regional support originally envisioned. On Wednesday, they voted to provide the match for this year.

Pichla: Thumb welfare-work rates misleading

Cass City Chronicle
5/31/06

by Maggie Peterson
Staff Writer

Comparing the welfare recipient work-participation rate of the Thumb area and Michigan is like comparing apples and oranges, according Marv Pichla, director of the Thumb Area Michigan Works!.

The region, comprised of Tuscola, Sanilac, Huron and Lapeer counties, uses the pilot program Growing-To-Work to count its work-participation rate.

This is a different system than the state's Work First program, and is posing some problems when it comes to numbers.

"If you look at a state level report, we look awful (in work-participation)," said Pichla.

The work-participation totals are important because of recent federal mandates requiring states to raise their work-participation rates.

Under these mandates, Michigan needs to reach a 50 percent work-participation rate by Oct. 1, or federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families funds will be cut by \$38 million.

The April 2006 state rate was 27 percent, said Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) spokesperson Maureen Sorbet.

At present, funding is \$775 million. "It (the funding cut) would impact some of the services that are offered to our clients," she said.

She added the cut is not expected because the state believes it will comply with federal mandates through its welfare programs, especially pilot programs like Jobs, Education and Training (JET).

"We don't believe we will be sanctioned," Sorbet said.

Pichla estimated that under the state count system, the Thumb area's rate is probably at 20 percent.

"And that's a lie," he said. "That is not correct, because when we did our pilot, we set ourselves up to operate our pilot, not the Work First program."

He added that when the state records the work-participation rate for the counties, it uses Work First standards.

Within the Growing-To-Work parameters, the number of people hitting their 40-hour requirement is high, almost 96 percent in March 2006, said JulAnn Kuenzli, of the Thumb Area Michigan Works! records department.

The fundamental difference between Growing-To-Work and Work First is in what counts toward the 40

required hours.

"The way the state prints out its participation rate is principally work-connected," Pichla said.

Examples of activities that count with Work First include employment, community service, unpaid work experience, vocational training up to one year and a job search, up to 6 weeks.

Three other activities, which count only if a person is completing 20 hours of work a week, are job skills training directly related to employment, education directly related to employment and high school or GED completion, if not a teen parent.

Growing-To-Work takes a more holistic approach, factoring in time spent on activities, such as classes and training, that better chances of employment toward the 40 hour a week requirement for assistance.

"Federally, all of that's allowable," Pichla said.

He said the pilot program proposal was submitted because Thumb Area Michigan Works! disagreed with the state and federal systems.

"Ours (Growing-To-Work) captures anything that relates to personal development," Pichla said.

The pilot was accepted and since February 2005, Growing-To-Work has been the "guiding principle" for the region, he said.

Recently, the state implemented JET in 4 counties.

One of these is Sanilac County, and Thumb Area Michigan Works! is blending JET with Growing-To-Work in that county, Pichla said.

He added the Michigan DHS and this region's Michigan Works! are making a team effort through JET to help welfare recipients and penalize those who do not meet the requirements.

"Nobody ever thought getting public assistance would be a full time job, but it is," he said.